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Values, Psychology and Human Existence

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The thesis of this paper is that values are rooted in the very conditions of human existence; hence that our knowledge of these conditions—that is, of the „human situation"—leads us to establishing values which have objective validity; this validity exists only with regard to the existence of man; outside of him there are no values. What is the nature of man, what are the special conditions of human existence, and what are the needs which are rooted in these conditions?

Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time reason and imagination, he is aware of his aloneness and separateness, of his powerlessness and ignorance, of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death. He could not face this state of being for a second if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the *old* ones, regulated by instincts. Even if all his physiological needs were satisfied, he would experience his state of aloneness and individuation as a prison from which he had to break out in order to retain his sanity. In fact, the insane person is the one who has completely failed to establish any kind of union and is imprisoned, even if he is not behind barred windows. The necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them, is an imperative need on which the fulfillment of man's sanity depends. This need is behind all phenomena which constitute the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word.

There are several ways in which this union can be sought and achieved, Man can attempt to become one with the world by *submission* to a person, to a group, to an institution, to God. In this way he transcends the separateness of his individual existence by becoming part of somebody or something bigger than himself and experiences his identity in connection with the power to which he has submitted. Another possibility of overcoming separateness lies in the opposite direction: man can try to unite himself with the world by having *power* over it, by making others a part of himself, and thus transcending his individual existence by domination.

The common element in both submission and domination is the symbiotic nature of relatedness. Both persons involved have lost their integrity and freedom; they live on each other and from each other, satisfying their craving for closeness, yet suffering from the lack of inner strength and self-reliance which would require freedom and independence, and furthermore constantly threatened by the conscious or unconscious hostility which is

bound to arise from the symbiotic relationship. The realization of the submissive (masochistic) or the domineering (sadistic) passion never leads to satisfaction. They have a self-propelling dynamism, and because no amount of submission or domination (or possession or fame) is enough to give a sense of identity and union, more and more of it is sought. The ultimate result of these passions is defeat. It cannot be otherwise; although these passions aim at the establishment of *a* sense of union, they destroy the sense of integrity, The person driven by any one of these passions actually becomes dependent on others; instead of developing his own individual being, he is dependent on those whom he submits to or whom he dominates.

There is only one passion which satisfies man's need to unite himself with the world and to acquire at the same time a sense of integrity and individuality, and this is *love. Love is union* with somebody, or something outside oneself *under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self.* It is an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full unfolding of one's own inner activity. The experience of love does away with the necessity of illusions. There is no need to inflate the image of the other person, or of myself, since the reality of active sharing and loving permits me to transcend my individualized existence and at the same time to experience myself as the bearer of the active powers which constitute the act of loving. What matters is the particular *quality of* loving, not the object. Love is in the experience of human solidarity with our fellow creatures, it is in the erotic love of man and woman, in the love of the mother *for* her child, and also in the love for oneself as a human being; it is in the mystical experience of union. In the act of loving, I *am one* with All, and yet I am myself, a unique, separate, limited, mortal human being. Indeed, out of the very polarity between separateness and union, love is born and reborn.

Another aspect *of* the human situation closely connected with the *need* for relatedness, is man's situation as *a creature* and his need to *transcend* this very state of the passive *creature. Man* is thrown into this world without his consent or will. In this respect he is not different from the animal, from the plants, or from inorganic matter. But being endowed with reason and imagination, he *cannot* be content with the passive *role of* the creature, with the role of dice cast out of *a* cup. He is driven by the urge to transcend the *role* of the creature, the accidentalness and passivity of his existence, by becoming a „creator."

Man can create life. This is the miraculous quality which he indeed shares with all living beings, but with the difference that he alone is aware of being created and of being a creator. Man can create life, or rather, woman can create life, by giving birth to a child and by caring for the child until it is sufficiently grown to take care of its own needs. Man—man and woman—can create by planting seeds, by producing material objects, by creating art, by creating ideas, by loving one another. In the act of creation man transcends himself as a creature, raises himself beyond the passivity and accidentalness of his existence into the realm of purposefulness and freedom. In man's need for transcendence lies one of the roots for love, as well as for art, religion, and material production.

To create presupposes activity and care. It presupposes love for that which one creates. How then does man solve the problem of transcending himself if he is not capable of creating, if he cannot love? *There is another*

answer to this need for transcendence; if I cannot create life, I can destroy it. To destroy life makes me also transcend it. Indeed, that man can destroy life is just as miraculous a feat as that he can create it, for life is *the* miracle, the inexplicable. In the act of destruction, man sets himself above life; he transcends himself as a creature. Thus, the ultimate choice for man, inasmuch as he is driven to transcend himself, is to create or to destroy, to love or to hate. The enormous power of the will for destruction which we see in the history of man and which we have witnessed so frightfully in our own time is rooted in the nature of man, just as the drive to create is rooted in it. To say that man is capable of developing his primary potentiality for love and reason does not imply the naive belief in man's goodness. Destructiveness is a secondary potentiality, rooted in the very existence of man, and having the same intensity and power as any passion can have. But—and this is the essential point of my argument—it is the *alternative* to creativeness. Creation and destruction, love and hate, are not two instincts which exist independently. They are both answers to the same need for transcendence, and the will to destroy must rise when the will to create cannot be satisfied. However, the satisfaction of the need to create leads to happiness, destructiveness to suffering—most of all, for the destroyer himself.

A third need, again following the conditions of human existence, is that for *rootedness.* Man's birth as man means the beginning of his emergence from his natural home, the beginning of the severance of his natural ties. Yet this very severance is frightening; if man loses his natural roots, where is he and who is he? He would stand alone, without a home, without roots; he could not bear the isolation and helplessness of this position. He would become insane. He can dispense with the natural roots only insofar as he finds new human roots and only after he has found them can he feel at home again in this world. Is it surprising, then, to find a deep craving in man not to sever the natural ties, to fight against being torn away from nature, from mother, blood and soil?

The most elementary of the natural ties is the tie of the child to the mother. The child begins life in the mother's womb and exists there for a much longer time than is the case with most animals; even after birth, the child remains physically helpless and completely dependent on the mother; this period of helplessness and dependence again is much more protracted than with any animal. In the first years of life no full separation between child and mother has occurred. The satisfaction of all his physiological needs, of his vital need for warmth and affection depend on her; she has not only given birth to him, but she continues to give life to him. Her care is not dependent on anything the child does for her, on any obligation which the child has to fulfill; it is unconditional. She cares because the new creature is her child. The child, in these decisive first years of his life, has the experience of his mother as the fountain of life, as an all-enveloping, protective, nourishing power. Mother is food; she is love; she is warmth; she is earth. To be loved by her means to be alive, to be rooted, to be at home.

Just as birth means to leave the enveloping protection of the womb, growing up means to leave the protective orbit of the mother. Yet, even in the mature adult, the longing for this situation as it once existed never ceases completely, in spite of the fact that there is, indeed, a great difference between the adult and the child. The adult has the means to stand on

his own feet, to take care of himself and even for others, whereas the child is not yet capable of doing all this. But, considering the increased perplexities of life, the fragmentary nature of our knowledge, the accidentalness of adult existence, the unavoidable errors we make, the situation of the adult is by no means as different from that of the child as it is generally assumed. Every adult is in need of help, of warmth, of protection, in many ways differing and yet in many ways similar to the needs of the child. Is it surprising to find in the average adult a deep longing for the security and rootedness which the relationship to his mother once gave him? Is it not to be expected that he cannot give up this intense longing unless he finds other ways of being rooted?

In psychopathology we find ample evidence for this phenomenon of the refusal to leave the all-enveloping orbit of the mother. In the most extreme form we find the craving to return to the womb. A person obsessed by this desire may offer the picture of schizophrenia. He feels and acts like the fetus in the mother's womb, incapable of assuming even the most elementary functions of a small child. In many of the more severe neuroses we find the same craving, but as *a* repressed desire, manifested only in dreams, symptoms, and neurotic behavior, which results from the conflict between the deep desire to stay in the mother's womb and the adult part of the personality which tends to live a normal life. In dreams this craving appears in such symbols as being in a dark cave, in a one-man submarine, diving into deep water, etc. In the behavior of such a person, we find a fear of life and a deep fascination for death (death, in fantasy, being the return to the womb, to mother earth).

The less severe form of the fixation to mother is to be found in those cases where a person has permitted himself *to be* born, as it were, but where he is afraid to take the next step of birth, to be weaned from mother's breasts. People who have become arrested at this stage of birth have a deep craving to be mothered, nursed, protected by a motherly figure,- they are the eternally dependent ones, who are frightened and insecure when motherly protection is withdrawn but optimistic and active when a loving mother or mother substitute is provided, either realistically or in fantasy.

Living is a process of continuous birth. The tragedy in the life of most of us is that we die before we are fully born. Being born, however, does not only mean to be free from the womb, the lap, the hand, etc., but also to be free *to be* active and creative. just as the infant must breathe once the umbilical cord is cut, so man must be active and creative at every moment of birth. To the extent that man is fully born, he finds a new kind of rootedness; that lies in his creative relatedness to the world, and in the ensuing experience of solidarity with all man and with all nature. From being *passively* rooted in nature and in the womb, man becomes one again-—but this time actively and creatively with all life.

Fourth, man needs to have *a sense of identify*. Man can be defined as the animal that can say „I," that can be aware of himself as a separate entity. The animal, being within nature and not transcending it, has no awareness of himself, has no need for a sense of identity. Man, being tom away from nature, being endowed with reason and imagination, needs to form a concept of himself, needs to say and to feel „I am I." Because he is not *lived, but lives,* because he has lost the original unity with nature, has to make decisions, is aware of himself and of his neighbor as different persons, he

must be able to sense himself as the subject of his actions. As with the need for relatedness, rootedness, and transcendence, this need for a sense of identity is so vital and imperative that man could not remain sane if he did not find some way of satisfying it. Man's sense of identity develops in the process of emerging from the „primary bonds" which tie him to mother and nature. The infant still feeling one with mother, cannot yet say „I," nor has he any need for it. Only after he has conceived of the outer world as being separate and different from himself does he come to the awareness of himself as a distinct being, and one of the last words he learns to use is „I," in reference to himself.

In the development *of the human race* the degree to which man is aware of himself as a separate self depends on the extent to which he has emerged from *the* clan and the extent to which the process of individuation has developed. The member of a primitive clan might express his sense of identity in the formula „I am we"; he cannot yet conceive of himself as an „individual," existing apart from his group. In the medieval world, the individual was identified with his social role in the feudal hierarchy. The peasant was not a man who happened to *be a* peasant, the feudal lord not a *man* who happened to be a feudal lord. *He was* a peasant or *a lord,* and this sense of his unalterable station was an essential part of his sense of identity. When the feudal system broke down, this *sense of* identity was shaken and the acute question „Who am I?"—or, more precisely, „How do I know that I am I?"—arose. This is the question that was raised, in a philosophical form, by René Descartes. He answered the quest for identity by saying, „I doubt, hence I think; I think, hence I am." This answer put *all the* emphasis on the experience of „I" as the subject of my *thinking ac*tivity, and failed to see that the „I" is experienced also in the process of feeling and creative action.

The development of Western culture went in the direction of creating the basis for the full experience of individuality. By making the individual free politically and economically, by teaching him to think for himself and freeing him from an authoritarian pressure, one hoped to enable him to feel „I" in the sense that he was the center and active subject of his powers and experienced himself as such. But only a minority achieved the new experience of „I." For the majority, individualism was not much more than a facade behind which was hidden the failure to acquire an individual sense of identity.

Many substitutes for a truly individual sense of identity were sought for and found. Nation, religion, class, and occupation serve to furnish a sense of identity. „I am an American." „I *am* a Protestant." „I am a businessman." These are the formulae that help a man experience a sense of identity after the original clan identity has disappeared and before a truly individual sense of identity has been acquired. These different identifications are, in contemporary society, usually employed together. They are in a broad sense status identifications, and they are more efficient if blended with older feudal remnants, as in European countries. In the United States, where so little is left of feudal relics and where there is so much social mobility, these status identifications are naturally less efficient, and the sense of identity is shifted more and more to the experience of conformity.

Inasmuch as I am not different, inasmuch as I am like the others and recognized by them as „a regular fellow," I can sense myself as „I." I am „as you desire me"—as Pirandello put it in the title of one of his plays. In-

stead of the preindividualistic clan identity, a new herd identity develops in which the sense of identity rests on the sense of an unquestionable belonging to the crowd. That this uniformity and conformity are often not recognized as such, and are covered by the illusion of individuality, does not alter the facts.

The problem of the sense of identity is not, as it is usually understood, merely a philosophical problem, *or a* problem concerning only our mind and thought. The need to feel a sense of identity stems from the very condition of human existence, and it is the source of the most intense strivings. Since I cannot remain sane without the sense of „I," I am driven to do almost anything to acquire this sense. Behind .the intense passion for status and conformity is this very need, and it is sometimes even stronger than the need for physical survival. What could be more obvious than the fact that people are willing to risk their lives, to give up their love, to surrender their freedom, to sacrifice their own thoughts for the sake of being one of the herd, of conforming, and thus of acquiring a sense of identity, even though it is an illusory one.

The fact that man has reason and imagination leads to the necessity not only for having a sense of his own identity but also for *orienting himself in the world intellectually.* This need can be compared with the process of physical orientation that develops in the first years of life and that is completed when the child can walk by himself, touch and handle things, knowing what they are. But when the ability to walk and to speak has been acquired, only the first step in the direction of orientation has been taken. Man finds himself surrounded by many puzzling phenomena and, having reason, he has to make sense of them, has to put them in some context which he can understand and which permits him to deal with them in his thoughts. The further his reason develops, the more adequate becomes his system of orientation, that is, the more it approximates reality. But even if man's frame of orientation is utterly illusory, it satisfies his need for some picture which is meaningful to him. Whether he believes in the power of a totem animal, in a rain god, or in the superiority and destiny of his race, his need for some frame of orientation is satisfied. Quite obviously, the picture of the world that he has depends on the development of his reason and of his knowledge. Although biologically the brain capacity of the human race has remained the same for thousands of generations, it takes a long evolutionary process to arrive at *objectivity,* that is, to acquire the faculty to see the world, nature, other persons, and oneself as they are and not distorted by desires and fears. The more man develops this objectivity, the more he is in touch with reality, the more he matures, the better can he create a human world in which he is at home. Reason is man's faculty for *grasping* the world by thought, in contradiction to intelligence, which is man's ability to *manipulate* the world with the help of thought. Reason is man's instrument for arriving at the truth, intelligence is man's instrument for manipulating the world more successfully; the former is essentially human, the latter belongs also to the animal part of man.

Reason is a faculty which must be practiced in order to develop, and it is indivisible. By this I mean that the faculty for objectivity refers to the knowledge of *nature as* well as to the knowledge of man, of society, and of oneself. If one lives in illusions about one sector of life, one's capacity for reason is restricted or damaged, and thus the use of reason is inhibited with regard to all other sectors. Reason in this respect is like love. just as

love is an orientation which refers *to all* objects and is incompatible with the restriction to one object, so is reason a human faculty which must embrace the whole of the world with which man is confronted.

The need for a frame of orientation exists on two levels; the first and the more fundamental need is to have some frame of orientation, regardless of whether it is true or false. Unless man has such a subjectively satisfactory frame of orientation, he cannot live sanely. On the second level, the need is to be in touch with reality by reason, to grasp the world objectively. But the necessity to develop his reason is not as immediate as that to develop some frame of orientation, since what is at stake for man in the latter case is his happiness and serenity, and not his sanity. This becomes clear if we study the function of rationalization. However unreasonable or immoral an action may be, man has an insuperable urge to rationalize it, that is, to prove to himself and to others that his action is determined by intelligence, common sense, *or at* least conventional morality. He has little difficulty in acting irrationally, but it is almost impossible for him not to give his action the appearance of reasonable motivation.

If man were only a disembodied intellect, his aim would be achieved by a comprehensive thought system. But since he is an entity endowed with a body as well as a mind, he has to react to the dichotomy of his existence not only in thinking but in the total process of living, in his feelings and actions. Hence any satisfying system of orientation contains not only intellectual elements but elements of feeling and sensing which are expressed in the relationship to an object of devotion.

The answers given to man's need for a system of orientation and an object of devotion differ widely both in content and in form. There are primitive systems such as animism and totemism in which natural objects or ancestors represent answers to man's quest for meaning. There are non-theistic systems, such as Buddhism, which are usually called religions although in their original form there is no concept of God. There are purely philosophical systems, such as Stoicism, and there are the monotheistic religious systems that give an answer to man's quest for meaning in reference to the concept *of* God.

But whatever their contents, they all respond to man's need to have not only some thought system but also an object of devotion that gives meaning to his existence and to his position in the world. Only the analysis of the various forms of religion can show which answers are better and which are worse solutions to man's quest for meaning and devotion, „better" or „worse" always considered from the standpoint of man's nature and his development.

In discussing the various needs of man as they result from the conditions of his existence, I have tried to indicate that they have to be satisfied in some way or other lest man should become insane. But there are several ways in which each of these needs can be satisfied; the difference between these ways is the difference in their appropriateness for the development of man. The need to be related can be satisfied by submission or by domination; but only in love is another human need fulfilled—that of independence and integrity of the self. The need for transcendence can be satisfied either by creativeness or by destructiveness; but only creativeness permits of joy, whereas destructiveness causes suffering for oneself and others. The need for rootedness can be satisfied regressively by fixation in nature *and* mother, or progressively by full birth in which new soli-

darity and oneness is achieved. Here again only in the latter case are individuality and integrity preserved. A frame of orientation may be irrational or rational-, yet only the ration*al one* can serve as a basis for the growth and development of the total personality. Eventually, the sense of identity can be based on primary ties with nature and clan, on adjustment to a group, or, on the other hand, on the full, creative development of the person. Again, only in the latter case *can man* achieve a sense of joy and strength.

The difference between the various answers is the difference between mental health and mental sickness, between suffering and joy, between stagnation and growth, between life and death, between good and evil. All answers that can be qualified as good have in common that they are consistent with the very nature of life, which is continuous birth and growth. All answers that can be qualified as bad have in common that they conflict with the nature of life, that they are conducive to stagnation and eventually to death. Indeed, at the moment man is born, life asks him a question, the question of human existence. He must answer this question at every moment of his life. *He* must answer it, not his mind, or his body, but *he,* the real person, his feet, his hands, his eyes, his stomach, his mind, his feeling, his real—not an imagined or abstracted—person. There are only a limited number of answers to the question of existence. We find these answers in the history of religion, from the most primitive to the highest. We find them also in the variety of characters, from the fullest sanity to the deepest psychosis.

In the foregoing remarks I have tried to outline these various answers, implying that each individual represents in himself the whole of humanity and its evolution. We find individuals who represent man on the most primitive level of history, and others who represent mankind as it will be thousands of years from now.

I said that the answer to life that corresponds to the reality of human existence is conducive to mental health. What is generally understood by mental health, however, is negative, rather than positive; the *absence of sickness, rather than the presence o f well-being.* Actually there is even very little discussion in the psychiatric and psychological literature of what constitutes well-being.

I would describe well-being as the *ability to be creative, to be aware, and to respond;* to be independent and fully active, and by this very fact to be one with the world. To be concerned with *being,* not with *having;* to experience joy in the very act of living, and to consider living creatively as the only meaning of life. Well-being is not an assumption in the *mind* of a person. It is expressed in his whole body, in the way he walks, talks, in the tonus of his muscles.

Certainly, anyone who wants to achieve this aim must struggle against many basic trends of modern culture. I want to mention very briefly only two. One, the idea of a *split between intellect* and *affect,* an idea which has been prevalent from Descartes to Freud. In this whole development (to which there are, of course, exceptions) the assumption is made that only the intellect is rational and that affect, by its very nature, is irrational. Freud has made this assumption very explicitly by saying that love by its very nature is neurotic, infantile, irrational. His aim was actually to help man succeed in dominating irrational affect by intellect; or, to put it into his own words, „Where there was Id, there shall be Ego.“ Yet this dogma of the split between affect and thought does not correspond to the reality of hu-

man existence, and is destructive of human growth. We cannot understand man fully nor achieve the aim of well-being unless we overcome the idea of this split, restore to man his original unity, and recognize that the split between affect and thought, body and mind, is nothing but a product of our own thought and does not correspond to the reality of man.

The other obstacle to the achievement of well-being, deeply rooted in the spirit of modern society, is the fact of man's dethronement from his supreme place. The nineteenth century said „God is dead"; the twentieth century could say „Man is dead." Means have been transformed into ends, the production and consumption of things has become the aim of life, to which living is subordinated. We produce things that act like men and men that act like things. Man has transformed himself into a thing and worships the products of his own hands; he is alienated from himself and has regressed to idolatry, even though he uses God's name. Emerson already saw that „things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Today many of us see it. The achievement of well-being is possible only under one condition: *if we put man back into the saddle.*